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Gloucestershire Education Committee

NOTES
FOR THE
CONFERENCE
OF JULY 18TH, 1925
ON
P.N.E.U. METHODS

COUNTY EDUCATION OFFICE,
SHIRE HALL, GLOUCESTER,
30TH JUNE, 1925.

9655. 1500 8-6-25. CRYPT HOUSE PRESS, BELL LANE, GLOUCESTER.

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FOR several generations elementary education was looked on as a thing apart, unlike any other kind of education that had ever been given. Some elementary minimum was to be provided for the worker's child. It was useful that the child should have acquired the mechanical accomplishment of reading and writing and summing. If he could do these things, and had received a not always suitable, nor always adequate, religious education, enough had been done for that type of child and mind. So the education was pitifully cheap. There were cheap buildings, cheap teachers, and a few, a very few, cheap readers. Books, in the true sense of the term, there were none. It was a long time before administrators realised (what many inspectors and more teachers knew) that there was no such type of child or mind as their fancy had invented, and that cheap buildings, cheap teachers and an inferior kind of book were not good for anybody, and could not produce satisfactory results. Moreover, the large class and the absence of books led to extemporised, and therefore unsatisfactory, teaching methods—to too much talking and far too much explaining and questioning by the teacher, while the child did little for himself, being too often a passive listener; and even when he did speak or write, he did so usually in response to the prompting of a question, which saved him most of the trouble of thought.

There are sections of the public even yet who have not realised that there is as high a percentage of ability among the children of the workers as in any other section of the community, and that their minds like their bodies will only thrive on good food. There is not a food, either mental or material, that is specially adapted to the worker's child. He needs the best there is, and the welfare of the country requires that he shall have it. If anything he needs it more than those more favoured children who are brought

up among well-educated people, and who have had access to the best of books. But it is well to remember that there are many people who have much money, and few books (and those valueless), and many on the other hand whose means are small, and who yet love good books, and contrive to read them. Foolish and intemperate talk—the evidence of a defective education—can be found among all sections of the community, though the unwise parsimony of earlier generations has made it inevitable that it should be more noticeable where the opportunity of a liberal education has been denied.

It was early in 1917 that our first little group of schools embarked upon the happy endeavour to give a liberal education to the worker's child under the inspiration of Charlotte Mason. And it is, as we all know, one of the great charms of that education that it is common to the worker's child and many who have been more fortunately born. When you have a common interest in great stories, great poetry, great pictures, great music, and high knowledge, you understand each other, and cease to drift apart. You learn a wider sympathy, and you begin to see that sound judgment must be worked for, and cannot be acquired ready-made. Hitherto it has been left for dogs and horses to provide a common bond, and their greatest admirers would hardly claim that they are the best.

In 1917 there were five schools following the programmes and employing the Charlotte Mason method—the one reading and the narration which make the child get its knowledge for itself, and, by sifting and arranging and expressing it, assimilate it and make it its own. Now there are 196 schools.

There are many where the work reaches an extraordinarily high standard of excellence: some from which one can take away exercise books and examination papers which nobody familiar with elementary schools would believe could possibly have been done in an elementary school at all, such is the charm and distinction of their style and the range of knowledge exhibited. But of course all cannot reach that standard. The genius of the teacher makes itself triumphantly apparent, even where, as one teacher of genius has phrased it, his chief part in explanation before and after reading and narration consists in “endeavouring

to curb one's desire to explain everything, and to encourage the scholars to ask for explanation.” There cannot now be any marking time, and the older children are receiving what is really a secondary education.

Now that so many schools are joining the P.N.E.U., it is quite impossible to keep touch with all of them during the critical first year, when some measure of discouragement is very general, and when it is so very easy to go wrong in points that matter. Visits to a certain number of beginners have revealed difficulties, which it is highly probable that others share. Some of those difficulties have been dealt with in the Circular letters of 15th February and 3rd November, 1924, and 12th March, 1925, but it has become plain that some schools need help which can only be given by obtaining access for them to the common stock of experience and skill. That was the purpose of the recent questionnaire, and that will be the main purpose of the Conference on July 18th.

The task of dealing with the replies has not been a light one, but it has been extraordinarily interesting. They have revealed so much wise thought, and sound practice, and intelligent enthusiasm, that it will be my fault only if those who need help do not find it.

I would like to add that I have a new joy in these days in visiting schools (and I think I have always been happiest there, for teaching is the work in education that I love best), and I can feel something of the difference that Charlotte Mason has made to the teacher's life in those schools which she inspires.

Question 5. The Rate of Promotion.

The answers to this question reveal a very great variety of practice, and it is plain that a number of schools are, as I had feared, pressing children on much too fast. Some answers show that a mistaken view of the requirements of the Annual Examination for Free Places in the Secondary Schools is partly responsible for this. For instance one Master says that his children spend one year in Form I and one year in Form II, and adds that “the necessity for the Age Group (10) getting into the Head

Master's class for the Scholarship Examination decides promotion for Form III."

This of course is a grave mistake. Children of ten are not equal to Form III, and their work can only be disappointing if they are hurried into it so prematurely. Miss Mason herself always said that Form I should take three years and Form II two or three years, and she deprecated rapid promotion. If they are hurried through those forms they miss so much that is intended for their age and that never comes again.

The requirements of the Scholarship Examination need not and should not enter into the question of promotion at all. Form II can do all that is required of the child in the English section of that examination. It is true that the Arithmetic paper requires of these children of eleven a working knowledge of vulgar and decimal fractions and of problems based upon them, and that old codes used to assign vulgar fractions to Standard V and decimal fractions to Standard VI, while the old system of yearly promotion did not get the child into Standard VI until he was twelve: but those days have been left behind. Decimals are now frequently and properly taken before vulgar fractions, and there is no sort of reason why children of nine should not be introduced to them and even enjoy them (if the teacher does).*

Classification and promotion for Arithmetic may well be organised quite independently of the English forms: but whether they are or not, quick children should be allowed to get on through their books at their own pace. The group system, and the individual work method, have shown us how very much faster bright children, from the infant stage upwards, can travel in all subjects, than they have been allowed to travel under the system that treats the class as indivisible and sets one pace for all its members.

To return to the question of promotion through the P.U.S. Forms, it is plain, as I have said, that a number of schools (most of them among the newer schools, for those who heard Miss Mason in Gloucester in 1920 would not do it) are pressing children through the Forms much too rapidly. Some very good schools

* Children following the P.U.S. work take decimals in IIb (9-10) and by eleven will have taken simple and complex fractions and proportion.

have no Form IV at all. Only eleven have one at present, and in most of those eleven only children who are fit for and capable of benefiting by private study are admitted to it.

Question 6.—The Group Method.

(a) AND (b). THE NUMBER AND SIZE OF THE GROUPS.

This is a matter in which there is (and I hope will continue to be) very great variety of practice. But I must not be misunderstood. There are some schools that do not believe in the Group Method at all; that would never adopt it if the supply of books were not of necessity restricted; and that employ a good deal of ingenuity (often with unsatisfactory results) in trying to avoid it even then. They lack faith and confidence. If they will take courage (after visiting a school that is employing the method with success: I can always find them one) they will be amazed and delighted at the results. We shall hear less then of this book or that being unsuitable, of children not being able to cover the programme, of explanation being frequently necessary to get understanding, of concentration being incomplete and narration inadequate, and so forth.

But if this be granted then in the number of groups into which a Form is divided, in the methods of handling them, and in the books grouped, there is great variety. You may have excellent schools at opposite poles of opinion. You may have A saying, "To my mind the lower down the school, the smaller the number of groups should be," and on the same side B, "Fewer groups required in Form I. Generally more concentration when taken together": while from the opposite pole C points out that "the greater the number of groups, the more each member is called upon to do either in reading or narration," and D (a Junior School) says "Infant groups should be fairly small. The smaller the groups, the better chance the teacher has to hear narration." I myself have seen infants working in groups of four, with their little heads together, romping through their books. In such schools children between six and seven years of age will read practically anything that you put before them: a book like *Our Island Story* they read easily at sight—though I hasten to add that I do not advocate this use of it, for it is a book

that is understood better and enjoyed much more if it is read to them.

There can be no doubt that the dissatisfaction of some schools with the Group method, as well as with certain books, is due to that premature promotion of children which has already been discussed.

(c) HOW AND BY WHOM IS NARRATION HEARD?

The following are representative answers:—

1. The teacher takes one group, or goes from group to group while each group narrates within itself. Sometimes a group will be asked to narrate to the whole class for criticism, and to receive, and answer if possible, questions that may be put to them.
2. Each group has a group leader who hears narration. At the end of each lesson the Form teacher calls one narrator from each group who narrates before the whole Form.
3. By the teacher as often as possible. Sometimes brighter children are paired with slower ones, and each narrates to the other.
4. Narration is heard by the group leader. Teachers go from group to group. Good narrations are given to the whole class.
5. The teacher should hear every child narrate several times weekly.
6. Teachers make a point of hearing every child narrate *once* at least each day.

(d) HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THE MATTER READ AND NARRATED IN GROUPS IS UNDERSTOOD?

Some answers are:—

1. By oral and written answers to questions which would prove that the books were understood. I find that the children will not pass over what they do not understand, but they ask to have it explained.
2. The teacher will soon discover the children whom it is necessary to watch. Written work is a main test: oral narration to teacher (in rotation): questioning by the children themselves.
3. The narration discloses whether matter is understood.
4. By calling upon several children to narrate on principal points in each chapter, and by written answers.
5. By the teacher passing from group to group during the lesson, and by narration in front of the class at the end of the lesson.

(e) IS ANY OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED FOR SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION BY THE FORM?

It is plain that discussion of this kind is not common. A good many schools think it is not possible to find time for it. The practice has however been found very fruitful in some schools, and it is recommended by one who was a student under Miss Mason and who knew her well.

Some answers are:—

1. Everything is done to get the child to discuss freely his or her ideas, and to break down any barrier between teacher and taught.
2. Children are encouraged to discuss after narration (a) the correctness of the version as narrated, and (b) the application of the subject matter, e.g. History and Citizenship, to everyday life.
3. Discussion afterwards when advisable, but no encroachment on the time for narration.
4. Yes; mainly in Upper Form.

(f) THE PART TO BE PLAYED BY THE TEACHER IN EXPLANATION BEFORE AND AFTER READING AND NARRATION.

Here, of course, we go to the very root of the matter, and here it is most necessary for teachers to have a firm hold upon Miss Mason's own teaching, for the tradition of elementary school and training college is all the other way.

It should be said at once that no teacher can hope to get out of the programmes and the method all that can be got, unless he reads and re-reads what Miss Mason herself has said about them. As I have said before, a copy of School Education or Home Education should be in every school, and should be in constant use. There should be no member of the staff who has not read it. Where I see wrong methods being employed—excessive explanation, excessive questioning, interruption of reading or narration—it is almost always found that the teacher does not know what Miss Mason taught, and has therefore no grasp of the principles that underlie the method that he is supposed to be employing.

There are teachers who are not happy until they have made certain that there is not a line, not a word, that the child does

not understand. Of course they are wrong. They are wasting time and hindering the child. The child has many years before it, and it has its own times and ways of arriving at understanding. Next year, without our having said one word, it will understand much that it does not understand to-day. Let it do its own work upon the books.

The following are helpful answers :—

1. As little as possible—occasional words and allusions. Geography requires map questions, and History a few questions before the lesson to deal with “line of time,” and Century book to fix “landmarks.”

2. Before reading link up with previous lesson (*not by questioning*), and in a few words rouse the children's expectation, but beware of explanation, which is almost sure to forestall the narrative.

After reading the narration should show whether any elucidation of the matter is necessary.

3. In the lower forms new words, especially names, are placed on the blackboard *beforehand*. There is always a brief introduction to the lesson. This is often obtained by a scholar narrating *the last lesson*, but is sometimes given by the teacher in a few words.

4. After the reading has begun no interruption is allowed: it checks interest and disturbs the flow of thought, which is fatal to narration. At the close of the lesson the children will say if anything has puzzled them.

5. Explanation is generally restricted to those points which narration reveals as not generally grasped. It is *not expected that the children will grasp everything*.

6. I think the chief part played (personally) is endeavouring to curb one's desire to explain everything, and to encourage the scholars to ask for explanation.

7. I avoid *explanation* before reading. Children must form the habit of concentration, discovery, and self-reliance.

The following delightful, and most apposite, quotation from Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *On the Art of Reading for Children* I owe to Mr. Hurdle, of Haresfield :—

“Don't stop (I say) to explain that Hebe was (for once) the legitimate daughter of Zeus and, as such, had the privilege to draw wine for the Gods. Don't even stop, just yet, to explain who the Gods were. Don't insist philologically that when every shepherd ‘tells his tale’ he is not

relating an anecdote but simply keeping ‘tally’ of his flock. Just go on reading, as well as you can, and be sure that when the children get the thrill of the story, for which you wait, they will be asking more questions, and pertinent ones, than you are able to answer.”

(g) HOW IS THE GROUP METHOD RECONCILED WITH THE TIME TABLE ?

The question was asked because a few beginners have found difficulty or felt doubt. The answers, however, show that the great majority have neither difficulty nor doubt. The following answers will be useful to those for whom Time Tables still have unnecessary terrors :—

1. When the class is working in groups—in our case three—Reading is entered on the T.T., and under (a) (b) and (c) to show what each group is doing: e.g. (a) Literature, (b) Geography, (c) History.

2. “Group” is written on the T.T. five lessons per week, and a list of books dealt with in Group work is placed on or under the T.T.

3. No difficulty arises. When e.g. the T.T. indicates History all Groups are at work on some part or other of the historical group of books.

4. Each child has its own reading T.T.

Question 7.—The use made of different Methods of Narration. Are there any books that are not Narrated ?

One of the latest recruits writes: “I hope there will be a very full discussion on Narration, because I feel that this is the keystone of the whole method.” It is, provided that the child is following the programmes, *i.e.* is employing Narration upon worthy material. Unless you have to tell again, you do not concentrate; and unless you both concentrate and have to make the effort of telling you do not really “know” what you have read. If you first concentrate and then have to tell, unquestionably you do know. Try for yourselves.

Narration being so all-important, I was very much surprised to find that in some schools *Ourselves* is not narrated, though it is a book that seems to me to lend itself especially to Narration. At the same time (I am reminded), with *Ourselves* more than with any other book perhaps, the teacher must use his discretion in choosing what form the narration shall take. Book I, Part III, Chapter X, for instance, suggests a short

essay on "Humility," while the preceding chapter on "Loyalty" suggests a list of characters renowned for their various loyalties. The early chapters of the book lend themselves to simple oral narration. Book I, Part I, Chapter III might be made easier by an impromptu personification by the children of the "Officers of State," etc., etc. Some exercise which depends upon previous silent narration is often possible where a straightforward oral narration cannot be obtained, the difficulty being that some of the subject matter is very intimate and children sometimes will not narrate it, especially the older girls and boys, but they will do work on what they have read. In other schools poetry is not narrated: indeed I suspect that it is far more often talked about and explained than narrated, but of that hereafter. In one, *Pilgrim's Progress*, of all books, is not narrated.

Of course the individual comes out in the answers to these questions. If in a few schools the children have difficulty in narrating Plutarch's *Lives*, it will almost certainly be found that the teacher (as one excellent teacher frankly confesses) does not like the book: he may or may not understand why Plutarch wrote it, why Miss Mason with her wonderful insight adopted it as an inspiration to Citizenship, or indeed why it is one of the world's great classics. Next to Shakespeare it is probably the book that is most enjoyed by the children, and it is one of the best for narration.

Different schools describe different books as being difficult for narration, but as other schools precisely similar in type find these same books easy and attractive, it is plain that (unless there has been premature promotion) the difficulty cannot be attributed to any want of intelligence or capacity on the part of the child. Its cause must as a rule be sought in the methods or tastes of the teacher.

The schools that I regard as soundest in their practice one and all say that *there are no books that are not narrated*, with the possible exception in one or two schools of some of the books for General Reading, and even with these there will from time to time be some form of reproduction either by dramatising or by writing or by telling.

I ought to add that it has been pointed out to me that dramatisation is easily carried too far (and yet often does not reach the point!) especially where teachers have some knowledge of the Dramatic method of teaching. It is safely used *after* a narration to emphasise some incident. If it is used as a form of narration there is a danger that incident shall take undue proportion and that the parts of a chapter that cannot be acted are not narrated. Thus in Arnold Forster's "*The Sealing of the Great Charter*," the incident of the interview with King John would no doubt impress the children if they acted the scene; but if the acting *took the place of narration*, the paragraph at the end of the chapter would be quite overlooked. In one non-P.N.E.U. School an oral lesson on Joan of Arc was followed by "expression work" in impromptu dramatic form, but in this case the content of the lesson was incident and fact, not (as in *Our Island Story* or Arnold Forster) a thoughtful account of a historical episode in which ideas and incidents play an equally important part. An impromptu tableau on the lines suggested in the July 1923 number of the *Parents' Review*, p. 452, is excellent, but this took place during the morning "break" and did not do duty for a "narration" in any way.

Out of many most helpful answers the following may be selected as representative:—

1. (A small two-teacher school).

Written, oral, dramatised, and illustrated narrations are adopted. Every lesson is followed by one of these methods of narration. There is no book that is not narrated.

2. (Also a two-teacher school).

Forms Ib, Ia, and IIb do mainly oral narration. Written reports follow in IIa and III chiefly. There are no books not narrated.

It should be said that it is plain that very little use is made of the short ten minutes' written Report.

3. (Four teachers).

Narration after all readings of set books; oral in Forms Ib and Ia; oral and written in IIb; oral, written, and silent in IIa and III. Records kept in upper Forms by children of work done.

4. (Five teachers : no infants).

Oral narration is used when the teacher reads to the class such books as Plutarch, General History, Natural History, etc. I find in class oral narration it is a good thing to divide the class into two teams in friendly competition to see which can retain most knowledge of the passage read.

5. (Four teachers).

Practically all work done by I and II is orally narrated before class teacher as well as (in group work) to group leader.

On Friday afternoon all classes have a long composition lesson (one hour), when children are given a question based on P.N.E.U. examination questions. There are two or three other half-hour compositions. Form III when doing private study narrate silently.

6. (Five teachers).

Either oral narration or written narration after each lesson. One written narration at least each day. Entry into diary of work done each day, but no written Report as such.

I expect that I have derived from some school in the past the suggestion, which I often make, that it is a useful practice to let three or four children narrate each passage, beginning with the weakest of them and ending with the best. The teacher can then put in a word or two to fill up any gaps still left, or correct any mistakes that are still uncorrected. But before that the flow of narration is probably better left unchecked.

Question 8.—Has the appeal of the books made itself felt? Has it affected the discipline? Has concentration been secured?

Let many teachers speak.

1. Much more work is done; pleasure is taken in it. Children being always busy are easier to control.

2. The children now work of their own free will, and may be left for long periods without supervision and the work still continues.

3. The upper Forms have become quite a simple management matter since the introduction of P.N.E.U. work. Form IV are particularly keen, and they are most left alone.

4. The interest aroused in the children is remarkable, and the work and interest undoubtedly produce or develop self-discipline.

5. The children love the books.

6. The children love the books, and they are becoming part of their lives. Discipline has been affected, for the children completely

rule themselves because they love work. Concentration has been secured. Inattention is unknown.

7. With very few exceptions the children are keenly interested, and the constant applications to take books home emphasise this point. Interest decides discipline.

8. Some of my most interesting lessons have been those that I have read to the class. I have had my Form tumbling over one another, as it were, in their eagerness not to miss a word, when reading such books as *The Changing Year*, *The Age of Fable*, *Architecture*, *English Literature*. One of my teachers holds the class when reading citizenship out of *Ourselves*.

9. The eager demand for the books is the best testimony to the appeal they make. Some children regularly take home books used in the programmes.

10. Discipline has improved because the children are interested.

11. Concentration almost entirely depends on the teacher. Where concentration is not secured it is not the fault of the scheme but of the teacher, and the teacher alone.

And yet in this school there are two rooms in which two classes and two teachers work!

12. There is great interest taken. The children do not wish to go back to the old methods. They are constantly asking to take home books, including history. There seems now to be a pleasure in mastering difficulties.

13. The books generally are interesting to the children, and are borrowed each afternoon for home reading. Rather more than half of the children borrow books from day to day, uninfluenced in any way by the teacher. The parents are keenly interested.

14. Much greater enthusiasm is shown for lessons and application to work. Many children are now acquiring a taste for good literature, and are developing a greater fluency in oral and written composition. It has much improved the tone of our school.

15. Yes, there is a new discipline, entirely different to old days.

16. The books do certainly appeal to them in an astonishing and delightful way. Discipline more natural and of a much higher standard.

As we must stop somewhere, let us stop here.

Question 9.—What has been the effect on the backward child?

Here even more teachers must speak. Asking, as I often do, for the exercise books of the weakest children, I can confirm from my own experience the opinion, expressed by so many, that the backward child is making an extraordinary advance.

1. Children of poor mental ability remain a difficulty. We often find, however, that children, who, under other methods, would probably be classified as dull throughout school life (Writing, Spelling and Arithmetic consistently weak), take great interest in Class Reading and Narration; and finding they can shine in one way often work exceedingly hard with corresponding improvement. The necessary spur is at hand under P.N.E.U. methods, whereas before it was lacking.

2. Decidedly beneficial. The few children who really do find it exceedingly difficult to learn to read are—*via* teacher's reading and narration—getting their minds stored with a far greater variety of ideas than ever before.

3. Good. If child is backward in one subject, there is generally one in which he feels more at home.

4. Group work seems to have a good effect on the dull children; they get more encouragement from their fellow workers in the group than they would otherwise get.

5. In a group of four, a backward child is expected by the other three, with their help, to keep up to the rate of progress. The backward child thus makes fairly satisfactory progress.

6. By fostering individual effort the teacher gets more time to attend to the backward child. A good plan is to get a sharp child interested in a backward child.

7. Improvement. Child takes a more intelligent interest in things generally.

8. Backward children have made at least as much progress as formerly, while some have shown unexpected intelligence. They seem to grasp what is read to them by the teacher.

9. Backward children easily respond to encouragement in narration and develop a belief in themselves.

10. Books read by the teacher enable backward children to do more than they used to do.

11. Many are making unexpected progress.

12. The method encourages the communicative instinct in the child, and the backward child soon joins in the game of learning by discussing, and is drawn out.

13. The backward child (who is as a rule the child where reading is not encouraged at home) is more responsive to the oral reading of the teacher than to his own independent reading.

14. Where backwardness is not due to hereditary mental disabilities, improvement is most marked, flexibility of speech showing much development.

15. The backward child profits. While gaining most of her knowledge from the reading aloud by the teacher, her interest is stimulated by the efforts of the brighter children, and she can receive individual attention from the teacher during the Group reading.

16. There are fewer backward children.

17. The backward child is no longer hopeless or listless, but in most cases eager.

18. The most backward child gains something and can tell what he cannot write. He is never left quite behind.

19. The backward children reach a higher standard than hitherto.

20. In the sense of a backward child of five years ago we have none.

21. It has proved that children, who find reading and writing difficult, often are keenly interested in oral work and can narrate well.

22. The backward child sometimes surprises one with his narration, but may be quite incapable of writing or spelling.

23. The backward child continues in his backwardness in a great many subjects, but in one subject or book interest will be taken and good work done. I had a notable example of this in a boy whose work was hopelessly bad, but when he came to *Life and Her Children* he became quite keen.

24. One very backward boy who could only mumble (seven years old) and had no idea of decent behaviour in class at first, began to find something attractive in stories, etc. He began to listen and now speaks quite plainly and brightly, with great improvement in behaviour.

25. The backward child is still with us, but I think it is a relative backwardness. The mechanical difficulties of expression still present themselves, but I am confident that an interest, an alertness, a beginning of understanding of books and their message, and a wider general knowledge can be seen amongst backward children which places them in a higher category than the backward child of ten years ago.

26. The backward child is encouraged when he finds himself able to narrate.

27. A marked delight in reading, and improvement in spelling and composition.

28. The question and answer method is fitted to the attainments of the average child in the class, with the constant discouragement of the backward child. The P.U.S. method obviates this discouragement, for it fits its demand to the ability of the individual. Each child is asked to narrate only what *it* has understood or appreciated.

29. Backward children become more interested and are *consequently much happier*.

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Mr. Boardman good on
geography.

Question 10.—What Geography is taken? Observations on Humanistic versus Scientific Methods, and their reconciliation.

This subject is one which I hope will receive full discussion on July 18th.

The answers to my questions make it plain that an overwhelming majority of the schools take the full P.U.S. programmes, with the Ambleside books, and have no wish to change. Some of course do not, and perhaps it is well to have variety of practice, especially as where the programmes are not followed there is generally a well thought-out scheme, and the oral teaching and questioning are in most cases as good as oral teaching and questioning can be. But let us remember how delusive questioning is, and how often the knowledge is not there unless the questioner is there too to bring it out.

Some of those who have doubts about the programmes and the Ambleside books are new to them, and obviously have not yet made full use of all the opportunities for teaching geography that are afforded. There is much geography, political, physical, and scientific, in books that are not so labelled. But on that subject all teachers should read what Miss Kitching has said in the paper printed in the June number of the *Parents' Review*. In History, of course, you simply cannot avoid the subject if you try. "What an opportunity Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* gave us in Asia Minor!" said a teacher to me the other day.

I set out below some typical replies that the questions brought in.

1. We are in a transition stage. We have not actually decided whether to return to the Ambleside books or not. Personally I am not satisfied with the whole P.N.E.U. Geography Syllabus. In whatever form the geography of this school will eventually be found, it will contain some of the P.N.E.U. "extras."

Again, personally, I think that the teacher leans to the humanistic (i.e. descriptive) or the scientific method as his bias or temperament is literary or definite (i.e. scientific, mathematical).

It is probably true that the majority of children are literary-minded, and hence will like the Ambleside and P.N.E.U. books, and hence will learn much descriptive geography.

A valuable and suggestive answer.

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2. At first I did not care for the P.N.E.U. Geography Scheme, but that was because I had not grasped how far it reached when all the books under the scheme were considered. Although mainly humanistic, as it should be for children, there is a great deal of scientific knowledge woven into the scheme. When scientific geography is thought necessary, the teacher gives a lesson with experimental or practical work, as in the teaching of mathematics. Geography approached from the humanistic standpoint is much more interesting to children of the elementary stage; the scientific facts are often memorised and not understood, their minds not having reached that stage in development to grasp scientific truths connected with geography.

3. The Ambleside Geographies do not constitute the whole of the geography work required by the programmes. Both aspects of the subject are provided for.

4. No geography teaching will give the correct atmosphere without attention to the humanistic side, but the scientific side should be developed. So much geography can be taught by deduction. I do not like Book III of the Ambleside Geography. It is studied by young children and narration is difficult. The other books are different.

5. In my opinion the whole of the P.N.E.U. scheme must be reviewed in order to gauge the merits of the geography taken. It will be found that there is an ample amount of both humanistic and scientific geography, and my experience is that children have far better geographical knowledge than they did under schemes drawn up by the Head Teacher.

6. I believe that the Ambleside Geography Book method, combined with the regular map work advised, produce good results and fix in the children a real idea of the regions they are discussing.

7. The children really enjoy the P.N.E.U. books, which means that they like geography (a fact for which I am truly grateful, when I remember how I detested it under the old methods as a child). At the same time I do not find the children remember sufficiently well, with once doing, the dry bones of geographical names and places, etc., and I rather think some means of securing greater definiteness and accuracy must be discovered.

I am inclined to think that the last sentence of No. 7 reveals a not uncommon need, and I think it probably arises because sufficient advantage is not taken of the constantly recurring opportunities of clothing the dry bones with flesh. The following

notes on a method of teaching geography I owe to Mr. Boardman, of Bishops Cleeve.

The method adopted here to reconcile the scientific view of geography with that of the humanistic as presented by the P.N.E.U. is by the use of a series of maps of each country studied. The child virtually makes its own atlas which shows for each country, relief, temperature, productions, population, rivers, towns, etc. A great proportion of these facts are put in the blank maps actually as part of the narration while "scientific" comparisons as to cause and effect and the like are made under the heading of map questions. Comparative maps of Europe are always at hand for reference as any fact in narration or discussion necessitates it. World geography is treated similarly, any place or fact mentioned being added to the map by appropriate sign. In addition to general questions, the syllabus (exercises on maps of world each week) gives ample scope for dealing with definite world geography which arises in many lessons other than geography. This term's work seems typical. The volcanic line of *Madam How* takes the child of IIb all over the world. *Sea Power* takes IIa and III from Gibraltar and Minorea to Jamaica and West Indies and follows the voyages of the early discoverers. *Round the Empire* is concerned with African colonies, Mediterranean colonies—Suez Canal and India. A calendar of events naturally includes the ambassadorial journey of the Prince of Wales, discussion of which would naturally seem to lead to the geography of the Atlantic Ocean. And History (as Van Loon) adds further geographical data.

I am tempted to reprint the passage from Sanderson, of Oundle, which I quoted in a recent circular :—

"An important question which we have been concerned with for at least three years is 'What is China? What is it like?' You may say, 'Methods of teaching geography.' But who ever learned anything from geography—as geography? Who wants to know geography as geography? Books exist for it, maps, plasticine exist for it. We want to know about China—we shall not get that sort of thing from the geography books. You will have to take the boys and let them find out what men have done who have been in China; to get products from China; to know its geology, and whether after all, the Chinese do so deeply love rice that they want to live on a very little a day. Do the Chinese love rice? Do they love underselling white labour? Do they want to? That is real geography, but not class room geography. That extension of interest, until China is brought into the class room and the boys are finding out about it, is, I claim, one of the deepest and greatest tasks to be undertaken. China—India—the Durham miners—spacious undertakings."

Question 11.—Are independent observations by the children required in connection with Natural History? If so, of what kind are they?

The answers leave with me the impression that in a very considerable number of schools Natural History is too much a matter of books only. The children do not appear to be observing for themselves. Much beautiful work used to be done by children in the course of independent observation, sometimes in connection with the school garden, sometimes not, before ever we were introduced to the joy of the P.N.E.U. programmes. There ought to be more of it than ever, but for some reason that escapes me there appears to be less. The programmes of course definitely require Nature Note-books and special out-door studies. The proper time for observations is the child's own time, when he is not thinking about school or teacher, but is looking for something he has read about and wants to see. Writing about them and drawing illustrations should be only a matter of opportunity in school.

Some of the schools take part in the Bird and Tree Competition of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has both its merits and its dangers. The teacher may so easily be tempted to do too much—and it is so immediately apparent when he does.

Question 12.—How is the reading of the novels of Scott and Dickens done? Have any difficulties been experienced?

The answers to this question vary widely. To take extremes: in one school the teacher reads the whole of the book to the children; in another it is read entirely at home; in one there is no attempt at narration; in another there is narration after every reading. In some schools the children find no difficulty with the books and enjoy them, in other exactly similar schools the books, and especially Scott, are not enjoyed, and often are not finished. Some schools find the Scottish dialect a bugbear: but the children usually delight in it if read to them, just as even very young children delight in the dialect of Uncle Remus,

which they would find most difficult and tedious to interpret if first met in print. I think that anybody who read all the replies, as I have done, would be driven to the conclusion that success or failure with Scott depends (apart from the question of premature promotion) entirely upon the manner in which the book is presented to the children. The books are not to be studied in detail, as one master suggests, but to be enjoyed.

Let us set schools over against each other under four different classes, (a) small country schools, (b) larger country schools, (c) urban or semi-urban schools, (d) schools in mining areas.

(a) SMALL COUNTRY SCHOOLS.

1. In Forms III and IV the children read the book entirely alone, as they would read a book at home. When *Old Mortality* was set, one boy of twelve could not leave it. When the work was changed I saw him on more than one occasion peeping in his book again. With Form II I read with them.

2. (In the same neighbourhood). The children love Dickens: Very adverse to Scott.

3. The children are encouraged to read always for the story. Permission is given for them to take these books home. Time could not be found for them in school hours. Scott is not popular except with those children who have a real literary instinct. I have had several, and really surprising have been their reproductions. Dickens makes a more universal appeal. It is a pity we cannot have more R. L. Stevenson. St. Ives was enjoyed by all.

4. Chiefly done at home. Bright scholars only really read and enjoy them.

(b) LARGER COUNTRY SCHOOLS.

5. They are read partly in class and partly by the children at home. Each child keeps a record of his reading and narrates silently. A class narration of the whole class is held periodically to keep them all together. The very slow children seldom read all of the book, but hear the narration of the others. A reading by the teacher of part of the book to stimulate general interest is given at times. The books are in demand for reading at home.

6. Scott and Dickens are very popular in Form III, and do not now present any difficulty. The long descriptive pieces in Scott were

very difficult at first. These are now read by a few children, but I encourage the children to seek for the story and read that.

7. Scott and Dickens are read, enjoyed, and understood in Form III, but average children in Form II find them rather difficult.

But there is premature promotion here.

8. Form III invariably get through Scott with more or less enjoyment, but Form IIa experience some difficulty. The Scottish dialect in *Rob Roy* bored them. *Anne of Geierstein* was enjoyed.

9. I have experienced difficulties with slower children. They seem to appreciate it when read to them. Six out of 24 read Scott quite independently last term.

This school is new to the programmes, though the master is not.

10. The books are read at home in the scholars' own time. By a judicious question now and again the teacher ascertains who is reading and who is not. If the book is not being relished measures are taken to awaken interest. There are a few scholars who do not read.

11. Chiefly in home reading. When the children get interested in the book they will, without prompting, ask permission to continue reading at home. A few parents encourage their children to read aloud to them.

12. A noteworthy feature . . . is the intense interest shown by the pupils in their books. When pupils continually ask if they can take home such books as Scott's, one realises what strides have been made in developing a real love of good literature.

(c) URBAN OR SEMI-URBAN SCHOOLS.

13. A very good school in many ways, but without faith in the methods or in its boys, as this and other answers plainly show.

Scott's novels are usually read by the teacher, but of several of the novels we have excellent abridgments, and these the boys are able to read for themselves. The same applies to Dickens.

Would that every one of these utterly unnecessary abridgments could be burnt!

14. The teacher reads the opening few chapters to the class. The class is then divided into groups. Each pupil takes the book for home reading two nights per week. A set amount of pages is given weekly so as to cover the book during the term. We find most of the scholars are ahead of the pages set.

15. A school not very far away from the last.

Scott's novels are disliked. Dickens is received kindly but not enthusiastically. The children complain that they do not understand Scott, and consequently that his books are dull: they rarely read the whole of the novel set.

16. By private reading at home, and by the teacher reading portions at the commencement to arouse interest. Failed at first owing to omission of narration, but the children now narrate to each other next morning any work they read at home.

17. The children are encouraged to take the books home to read. In chapters of Scott in which the Scottish dialect is much used the teacher reads aloud to the children.

(d) SCHOOLS IN MINING AREAS.

18. Silent reading. Children encouraged to take books home. Narration in groups, teacher moving from group to group.

19. Many ask to take them home. Very few difficulties have been experienced with either. Of course some like them better than others. When the book is placed before them, if they do not seem to take to it readily, the teacher awakens their interest by reading carefully selected portions to them. I find the parents read them, or get the children to read them.

20. Children do not take kindly to the Waverley Novels, especially those whose scenes are laid in Scotland. Too much Scotch phrases and words seem to bore and bother the child. The books such as *Kenilworth*, *Ivanhoe*, *Talisman* and *Quentin Durward*, where there is an absence of such provoking matter, are better appreciated. These books are taken home by the children.

Here perhaps we have the children affected by the teacher's own likes and dislikes. He is annoyed by the Scottish dialect himself!

Question 13.—History and Citizenship.

There is not much to be said here. Probably the following remark fairly represents the average view:—"Arnold-Forster's

History and Plutarch's *Lives* present difficulty when first tackled, but the girls grow to love both."

Schools that are in their first year of the programmes generally find both books rather hard for Form IIb, but as a rule the difficulty disappears when children enter the Form who have had two or three years in a good Form I. Much of course depends upon the age of the children and upon the progress made with reading before and since leaving the Infant Class.

Some schools think that, as one puts it, "if these subjects are taken as collective lessons (Plutarch of course must always be taken in that way) the children are able to grasp the work better than if taken by the group method"; another (a sound and safe guide) discriminates, and says "History dropped as a group reader for the *Nineteenth Century* period owing to the detailed nature of the work. The children follow more clearly from the reading of the teacher."

In some schools the effort of concentration presents less difficulty (my own observation confirms the opinion), and confidence and enjoyment are greater in due proportion.

Question 14.—How is Poetry handled? Are there any difficulties?

I am inclined to think, both from my own observation and from the nature of the replies, that poetry is handled in a less satisfactory manner than any other subject. The reason is that teachers—perhaps more often young teachers—will not believe that children can understand poetry without help, and overload their lessons (it should not be a lesson, but a joy) with questions and explanations that are entirely unnecessary, that kill all interest, and effectually prevent the poetry from making its own swift and irresistible appeal. We are reading Shakespeare without notes, and largely without explanation, and the children love the plays. Why not poetry too? The fifty per cent. that they understand and love in Shakespeare is worth infinitely more than the hundred per cent. that it is the inclination of the adult to force upon them.

Poetry should be read aloud by the teacher simply and naturally. Bad reading ruins it. If the reading is good children

will always love it, and they will very soon acquire a feeling for rhythm, and will begin to experiment themselves. Poetry should always be narrated after the one reading, just like any other book. That is the beautiful Ambleside practice. Elaborate paraphrasing is fatal. Let the children just tell what the reading meant to them, and it will be found that they have both understood it and enjoyed it. Even Burns presents no serious difficulty. What does it matter if the meaning of a word or two is vague, so long as the whole is enjoyed? If a word really matters the children will be quick to ask. If they do not, let us be thankful and go on. We need not ask "what did the writer mean?" we need not talk about it much; above all we must not "paraphrase in order to get the meaning," as is the confessed practice of one school.

Where poetry is loved it is treated in the manner that I have described. From such a school a few weeks ago—a school that has only been following the programmes for a year—I brought away the last of a good many delightful little poems that at one time or another I have come across. Here it is:—

LEAVES IN AUTUMN.

Green, Red, Gold and Brown
Leaves come fluttering gently down,
One leaf here and one leaf there,
Makes this world a palace fair.
Nature in this term of gladness
Rids the world of all its sadness,
Leaves in Autumn all are dressed,
With Nature's clothes the very best.
Not with human touch or sound
The gay leaves flutter to the ground
Not by themselves alone they fall
But, by Nature's gentle call.

GWENDOLYNE M. WATERS (age 12½ years).

I do not think that we should *try* to get children to do this. I fancy that if we do we shall prevent or spoil it. It does not come by teaching, but just by loving. It is an expression, a spontaneous expression, of the child's own feeling.

Question 15.—How is Shakespeare taken? Are there any difficulties?

The replies leave no doubt that Shakespeare is of all subjects the favourite, and is almost universally enjoyed. I hear no word of difficulties. One school indeed—the school that paraphrases poetry, a good school, but over-anxious—would make some if it might, for it says that "text-books with notes would be useful for private study," but all is well, for it will not get them.

The following are typical answers:—

1. Reading, dramatisation, narration.

Form IIb, ages 7–9, find Shakespeare difficult at first, but Shakespeare is generally popular.

But of course no children of seven or eight should be in Form IIb at all. Miss Mason considered Arnold Forster and Shakespeare too difficult for children under nine.

2. Shakespeare is immensely enjoyed. All classes look forward to each lesson, even the backward children. The taking of parts is essential to enjoyment. We do not do too much narration: the children want to get on. We do *discuss* it with profit.

3. Difficult passages are explained if important, otherwise no explanations are offered.

4. Shakespeare as a rule a favourite. Children quick to see humour and pathos. The various parts of the plays are taken by the children in turn.

5. This is perhaps one of the most loved lessons of the week. We usually choose characters. Asked why they liked Shakespeare, the following amongst the answers: "it is so easy to understand," "it is so exciting," "it is often so funny."

Question 16.—Are Rural Pupil-Teachers following the Programmes?

In three schools they are. One Master writes, "My Pupil-Teacher, I.M. (who passed), was trained entirely on the Programmes for Forms IV and V. In fact the work covered by Form IV is wide enough in scope to ensure success for any candidate for the Preliminary Certificate."

Question 17.—Any observations with regard to Picture Study and Music.

This question brought in a chorus of petitions for coloured reproductions. One teacher kindly sent me a specimen of Turner's *Fighting Téméraire* which I forwarded with his letter to Miss Kitching, and I think I cannot do better than set out some passages from her long and very carefully considered reply. "Miss Mason," she says, "discussed the matter several times. She felt that a really good coloured reproduction was so rare, that a good uncoloured reproduction was better. I think the coloured illustration Mr. X. sends is a very good example of what Miss Mason feared would happen. The colour is so fresh and bright and *evident* that the child would hardly see the picture behind, and would feel that the original was rather a 'worn out' picture beside it. Whereas, knowing the picture, only uncoloured, the child would be entranced when he saw the original with its ethereal colour. . . . Colour and vibration are so much akin that to give children coloured reproductions as they are done at present, seems rather like giving cheap records of Beethoven on a cheap gramophone. Unless the reproductions are really satisfactory it seems better not to set them for study."

It is plain that picture study is generally enjoyed, but I am not sure that the best method of conducting it has always been grasped. Unfortunately here I can give no help except—and perhaps after all that is the best help—to set out a passage from Miss Mason's posthumous book, *An Essay towards a Philosophy of Education*, pp. 214-216 :—

A friendly picture-dealer supplies us with half-a-dozen beautiful little reproductions of the work of some single artist, term by term. After a short story of the artist's life and a few sympathetic words about his trees or his skies, his river-paths or his figures, the little pictures are studied one at a time ; that is, children learn, not merely to see a picture but to look at it, taking in every detail. Then the picture is turned over and the children tell what they have seen—a dog driving a flock of sheep along a road but nobody with the dog. Ah, there is a boy lying down by the stream drinking. It is morning as you can see by the light, so

the sheep are being driven to pasture, and so on ; nothing is left out, the discarded plough, the crooked birch, the clouds beautiful in form and threatening rain, there is enough for half an hour's talk and memory in this little reproduction of a great picture, and the children will know it wherever they see it, whether a signed proof, a copy in oils, or the original itself in one of our galleries. We hear of a small boy with his parents in the National Gallery ; the boy, who had wandered off on his own account, came running back with the news, " Oh, Mummy, there's one of our Constables on that wall." In this way children become acquainted with a hundred, or hundreds, of great artists during their school-life, and it is an intimacy which never forsakes them. . . . In the course of school-life children get an Open Sesame to many art galleries, and to many a cultivated home ; and life itself is illustrated for them at many points. For it is true as Browning told us,—

" For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love

First when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see."

Here is an example of how beautiful and familiar things give quite new delight when they are pictured. A lady writes :—

" I was invited to a small village to talk about the P.U. School. Twelve really interested women came in spite of heavy rain. . . . I suggested introducing them to some of the friends their children had made, and we had a delightful picture talk with Jean B. Corot delightful to me because of the way one woman especially narrated, She did it as if she had been set free for the first time for months. It was the ' Evening ' picture with a canal on the right and that splendid mass of quiet trees in the centre. The others gave bits of the picture, but she gave the whole thing. It was a green pasture to her."

The noteworthy thing is that these women were familiar with all such details as Corot offers in their own beautiful neighbourhood, but Browning is right ; we learn to see things when we see them painted.

It will be noticed that the work done on these schools of painting, by the children themselves. There is no talk about schools of painting, little about style ; consideration of these matters comes in later life, but the first and most important thing is to know the pictures themselves. As in a worthy book we leave the author to tell his own tale, so do we trust a picture to tell its tale through the medium the artist gave it. In the region of art as elsewhere we shut out the middleman.

Of musical appreciation very little has been said, and unfortunately I am not able myself to give any help with this subject. I know just enough to realise that I know nothing. Two or three schools where musical appreciation is handled delightfully have said nothing. No doubt they felt that I knew

what they were doing, and that there was no more to tell. It is all a question of knowledge and skill. There must be somebody at hand who has both. The lesson, to be successful, must be very good. If it is good the children love it, for good music makes an even swifter appeal to them than good poetry. They must have music; it is a natural craving; and they rush to the inferior, because as a rule they cannot gain access to any other. If they are allowed to *know* the good, their judgment is extraordinarily sound. We have done nothing to educate the public taste in art and music, and very little to educate it in literature, and it is not for us to quarrel with it, or to disparage it if it is bad. The fault is ours. The Greek worker of 450 B.C. knew and loved what was good: our people do not know it, and cannot love it till they do.

I owe the following memorandum, which seems to me very helpful, to the kindness of Mrs. Coombes, of Coalpit Heath School:—

MUSICAL APPRECIATION IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

I know not why, but I had always been afraid to make a start with Musical Appreciation lessons. So many had said to me, when I approached the subject, "But do you really think an elementary school child can understand it?" At any rate, after much thought, I said to myself, "I can but try," so last term I made my first attempt, and I must confess, before many lessons were taken, I found that the majority of my scholars, although not brilliant in some of the other school subjects, were keenly alive in the musical sense, and *could* appreciate, and derive much enjoyment, from listening to music by a famous composer.

We were not able to devote more than one lesson a fortnight to this subject, but the time was eagerly looked forward to, I think, both by myself and the children, as it made such a pleasant break in the ordinary routine of the school. The method I adopted (I do not know whether it will be considered the best one) has been to take a short period of the lesson in talking about the life of the musician being studied, and the remainder of the lesson to the performance of one of his works. I think, in talking about the life and environment of the musician, very often the interpretation of the music becomes clearer. Take for instance Mendelssohn. We talked about his tour in Italy—his visit to Venice, the gondolas and waterways, and then listened to his Venetian Boat Songs; and I think the children then appreciated the rhythm and meaning of these beautiful little "Songs without Words."

We may not always achieve the objects desired, but at any rate,

we shall have done something in lifting the children's thoughts out of their often ordinary surroundings. Then, too, I think the reading of poetry will also improve, for surely poetry is music. It has been a great surprise, when the children have been asked to write their ideas and thoughts on the music heard, to find how eager and ready they were to do so.

Any teacher, to whom music appeals, and who is afraid perhaps to venture on the scheme, would do well to read "*A Child's Path to Music*," by Miss E. Allen, a lecturer in Musical Appreciation to the Manchester Education Committee, which will be found delightfully simple and helpful. I have also received much help from *The Master Musicians* and *Studies of Great Composers*, loaned from the County Library, together with notes from the *Parents' Review*.

In conclusion, many of our leading cities now run Municipal Orchestral Concerts at certain times of the year, where for the modest sum of sixpence one can enjoy a programme of the best music, and how much would have been accomplished, if the children in our schools could, through their musical appreciation lessons, be induced to take an intelligent interest in such enjoyment, rather than in picture palaces, where very often the pictures shown are not suitable or edifying to the young mind]

Those who have seen the children of the City of Gloucester and the neighbouring villages at one of the organ recitals, which from time to time Dr. Brewer has so kindly given in the Cathedral for their benefit, can never forget the delight with which they listened to the music of great masters, when its meaning had been explained and illustrated.

Some villages during the past winter have been delighted by one of the "Village, Country Town, and School Concerts" organised by the Rev. Walpole Sealey, and assisted by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. As a rule a school concert is given in the afternoon and is free, if an evening concert can be arranged with tickets to pay expenses.

Printed as an appendix will be found the letter of the 24th April, with the Questionnaire in full which accompanied it; also the circular letter of 3rd November, 1924, and some passages from the circular letter of 15th February, 1924. Both circulars deal with points which it has not been thought necessary to refer to again in the preceding pages.

H. W. HOUSEHOLD.

30th June, 1925.

APPENDIX.
COUNTY EDUCATION COMMITTEE,

SHIRE HALL, GLOUCESTER,
24th April, 1925.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

I have heard from many teachers that they greatly hope that a Conference will be held in the Summer for the discussion of our P.U.S. methods, but I have received hardly any suggestions as to the topics to be discussed.

It had been in my mind to invite a number of short papers on the subjects on which discussion was desired, and to have these printed and circulated beforehand so that they might form a basis for question and discussion. I find great difficulty, however, in selecting the topics and in inviting contributions, and I have had therefore to fall back upon another method. I am enclosing a questionnaire, to which I invite answers so far as each teacher feels able to contribute them.

I hope that the answers, so far as given, will always reveal quite frankly the method followed in the School concerned: and that any difficulties felt to arise out of those methods (whether methods of your choice, or the group method which has been imposed upon you of necessity) will be frankly disclosed.

It may well be that some teachers will feel that their experience has not yet been long enough to enable them to express definite opinions, or that the first six questions are all that they care to answer, or that of the remaining twelve only one or two appeal to them. I hope that they will in these matters follow their inclinations. Having regard to the mass of material that I shall have to deal with, I could almost hope that every question will not be answered by everybody.

The replies to the questions I will try to edit (it will be a very heavy task) and throw into pamphlet form without indicating the identity of school or teacher. I shall also be very glad to receive any short papers which individual teachers think would be helpful, and will print them if possible. The pamphlet will then form the basis of a discussion, which would follow the order in which the several subjects are treated.

The only possible dates for the Conference are the afternoons of Saturday, June 20th, and Saturday, July 18th. With so much work to be done I rather favour the later date, but I would try to manage the earlier one if there is a decided preference for it.

Yours truly,

H. W. HOUSEHOLD,

Secretary.

To the Head Teacher.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

P.N.E.U. CONFERENCE, 1925.

QUESTIONS TO WHICH ANSWERS ARE INVITED.

1. Name of School.
2. Number on roll on 1st April, 1925.
3. Staff.
4. P.U.S. Forms taken: their distribution between the different members of the staff: and the number of children in each Form.
5. THE RATE OF PROMOTION.
 - (a) Time spent by average child in Form I.
 - (b) Time spent by average child in Form II.
 - (c) Qualifications required for, and usual age of, entry into Form III and the time spent in it.
 - (d) Qualifications required for entry into Form IV.
6. THE GROUP METHOD.
 - (a) The number and size of the groups in your School.
 - (b) Is it desired to have fewer groups in one class than in another?
 - (c) How and by whom is narration heard?
 - (d) How do you ensure that the matter read and narrated in groups is understood?
 - (e) Is any opportunity afforded for subsequent discussion by the Form?
 - (f) The part to be played by the teacher in explanation before and after reading and narration.
 - (g) How the Group Method is reconciled with the Time Table.
7. The use made of different methods of Narration—oral, silent and written: and the use, if any, made of the short ten minutes' written Report of what has been read and narrated orally or silently.
Are there any books that are not narrated?
8. (a) Interest. Has the appeal of the books made itself felt? Has it affected the discipline?
(b) Has concentration been secured? The group method probably makes this more difficult in the smaller Schools.
9. What has been the effect on the backward child?
10. (a) What Geography is taken?
(b) Observations on Humanistic versus Scientific Methods and their reconciliation.
(c) The effect upon other subjects of the use for this subject of inferior books that will not narrate.

11. Are independent observations by the children required in connection with Natural History? If so, of what kind are they?
12. How is the reading of the novels of Scott and Dickens done? Have any difficulties been experienced?
13. History and Citizenship.
14. How is Poetry handled? Are there any difficulties?
15. How is the Shakespeare taken? Are there any difficulties?
16. Are Rural Pupil-Teachers following the Programmes?
17. Any observations with regard to Picture Study and Music.
18. Any observations which it is desired to make on any other subject (including the treatment of requisitions).

COUNTY EDUCATION OFFICE,

SHIRE HALL, GLOUCESTER,

3rd November, 1924.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

At several P.N.E.U. Schools within the last few months I have found the method of narration misunderstood and wrongly used. As other Schools may be making the same mistake I venture to call attention to it.

The attempt is being made by reading very short passages to get the children to remember and reproduce the very words of the book, as though it were the words that are all important. Now the object of narration is to compel the child to perform the "act of knowing," by which knowledge is acquired and assimilated. If a child has to tell the substance (as distinct from the words) of what it has read, it must (1) concentrate its attention on the reading and (2) sift out its knowledge and arrange it in order, thereby making it its own. But the laboured repetition of words is an act of memory and not an act of knowing, and may be (and indeed is too likely to be) mere parrot repetition without understanding. There is no sifting out of facts, no arranging of them, no choice of appropriate language, no sign that there is in the mind any picture of the facts—only a string of words that may mean very little to the child if it has made no effort to comprehend. Though a child will often remember and reproduce the exact words of striking passages, and may fitly do so on occasion, it should not be the aim of the teacher to train it to do so. The passage, to be read once only, should always be too long to admit of reproduction by verbal memory.

It will be helpful if I append some notes by one who was trained by Miss Mason and who has taught, and visited a number of P.N.E.U. Schools.

"Narration is not the oral or written remembrance of the words in their due order. It is the expression of what the child mentally visualised while he listened, or read, or looked. Indeed a too close verbal accuracy should be

taken as a danger signal. It will soon die a natural death if the teacher will help the children to concentrate on the consecutive mental pictures. Naturally, words and expressions will unconsciously be borrowed from the books and used as the most fitting way the child can express what he wishes to convey.

"Not only is narration not verbal memory, but reading and narration do not constitute the whole of the lesson. They are the kernel but not the whole fruit. There is the introduction and connection with the last lesson; there is the intelligent use of map, blackboard and pictures; there is the time after the narration for discussion. If a part of the lesson for any reason has to be omitted, this part may never be the narration, for narration is not, as so many people think, a test of the knowledge gained, but an integral part of the acquisition of knowledge, and the means whereby the 'food of the mind' (i.e. knowledge) is digested. At this stage questions are useless—a help to the lazy and a hindrance to the thoughtful—what the child needs is time to digest it quietly for himself. This he does through narration. If the lesson has been misunderstood, narration will show where, and *when that is finished* it is the teacher's part to start a discussion in order to clear up misconceptions, etc."

I would also add the following note after consultation with those who knew Miss Mason's views.

In the upper standards silent narration is more used than oral narration; though the latter should not be entirely abandoned, for the habit of beautiful and thoughtful speech is of great value, and it is well to ensure that proper names and unfamiliar words are rightly enunciated—though of course there are other ways of doing that.

As an occasional substitute for oral narration the older children may also with advantage write short notes from memory—a précis in fact, written without reference to the book—after a suitable lesson; and occasionally, where the matter is difficult, they may analyse and tabulate with the book before them as described in the second paragraph ("Other Ways of Using Books") on p. 180 of *School Education*. Again, the broad "Tell me what you have read," which introduces narration, may well give place with these older children to more definite tasks; and thought-provoking questions (to be answered not orally but in writing) may be set—questions such as can only be tackled in the light of knowledge gained in recent lessons. Care of course is required in setting questions, because we have been in the habit of asking far too many—so many that the child becomes dependent on the questioner, and seldom performs the act of knowing without which it does not become master of the knowledge, which it only half assimilates. The questions set in the terminal examination papers sent from Ambleside may be taken as models. In this connection pages 179 to 181 of *School Education* should be studied (though, I am afraid, marginal notes must not be made in books, unless they belong to the children).

As I have frequently said, that book should be in every school, and should be constantly studied by all the members of the staff in order that the principles which underlie the method of narration may be understood.

This memorandum should be read and discussed at a staff meeting, and if any difficulty is felt with regard to any point in it I should be very glad if I might be allowed a further opportunity of explaining it.

Yours truly,

H. W. HOUSEHOLD,

Secretary.

To the Head Teacher.

EXTRACT FROM CIRCULAR LETTER TO HEAD TEACHERS
DATED 15TH FEBRUARY, 1924.

Some of the smaller Schools that have joined lately are finding difficulty in conducting Forms Ia and b and IIa and b as four separate units. It may not be wise to attempt to do so at first. Later they will probably find that they can, because Form IIa often develop a surprising power of working by themselves.

In order to reduce the number of separate units to three or two, different Schools will make different selections according to the capacity of their children. Where the Infant Class is taking the "Tales" and English History of Form Ib—and many are doing that now and making a most successful start with written composition—the children on promotion will be ready to do most of the work of Form Ia.

There will, of course, always be some children who can get on faster than the majority of the Form. The children, if the Form B work is being taken, can always do in addition some of the Form A work. Or if, for example, it were thought wise to give the whole group Form A work in certain subjects, as it might be with Citizenship in the case of Form II, the brighter group could take by themselves the Stories from the History of Rome of Form B, which they would not otherwise see.

But though A and B books can be thus interchanged, Miss Kitching wishes me to say that the books for Form II should not be used in Form I or the books of Form III in Form II. This was Miss Mason's own rule.

With the books that are read aloud (which vary very much in different Schools according to the capacity of the children and the confidence of the teachers) it might be well generally to take the Form A books. It would be a pity to miss the British Museum in Form II, and disastrous to omit the Plutarch which children so surprisingly delight in.

In Schools that are making their first beginning the work of Form III should not be attempted. Form II will provide ample scope for the first year.

Under no circumstances whatever should the practice be adopted of allowing two children to read from a single book.